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ABSTRACT

Colorado's bilingual program, which allows Anglo children to participate on a voluntary basis, has been successful in increasing skills in English and in achievement areas measured by English standardized achievement tests, and in improving self concept, attendance, and parent participation. Opponents of bilingual education have claimed that it endangers the melting pot principle, that earlier immigrants pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, and that bilingual education enhances separatism, preserves ghettos and barrios, and delays the integration of non-English speaking children into the mainstream of American society. These myths "seem to be a 'rational' attempt to justify our ethnocentrism and latent racism." A creative bilingual program freed of various restrictions imposed by federal and state funding requirements could: (1) encourage majority group participation; (2) allow children to learn in two languages so that they are bilingual; (3) offer equal educational opportunity for all and provide a pool of capable bilingual citizens for diplomacy, commerce, and other fields of endeavor; (4) foster integration and cultural understanding; and (5) create a learning environment in which the languages and cultures of all the students are treated with equal respect. (CM)

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

Bilingual education is a subject which touches a raw nerve for many people. Bilingual education is a topic which can raise the decibel level of a conversation at a cocktail party to the highest level on the scale. Bilingual education is a subject rarely discussed--pro or con-- without passion. Yet rarely does the debate touch on the educational aspects of a bilingual program.

In this article I would like to recount the educational success of bilingual education in one State of Colorado. Then I would like to address the non-educational issues which seem to be the main concerns of the vocal opponents of bilingual education. Lastly, I would like to suggest how the concept of bilingual education could be expanded to strengthen and deepen a pluralistic U.S. society which exists within an increasingly diverse and plurastic world.

I. Educational Success of Bilingual Programs in Colorado

Bilingual Education is an instructional process designed to assist students who have a language other than English in their home backgrounds and who are not achieving academically in school. In Colorado in 1975 the State Legislature mandated a bilingual program for the lower grades of elementary school -- kindergarten to third. Where a school has 10% or 50 children of its K-3 enrollment who are linguistically different it must provide a full time bilingual program. In order to have an ethnically integrated

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program the Colorado legislature wisely allowed for "Anglo" participation on a voluntary basis. Over half the participants are children who are not "linguistically different" or limited English proficient (LEP). For the last four years the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has produced a statewide evaluation done through an outside nationally respected evaluator, Ross Goldsmith. The results are outstanding. Over 90% of the programs that have usable data (only 3 out of 42 programs didn't) showed that the LEP students progressed both in English and in achievement areas measured by English standardized achievement tests at the rate normally expected by all students. What was even more startling was that 50% showed significant improvement i.e., well beyond the normal expected growth rate in English and achievement areas. Attendance, self-concept and parental involvement were also high. The English speaking students have also done well. Bilingual education has proven very successful in Colorado.[1] These facts are indisputable for Colorado.

Santa Fe did a longitudinal study and showed that bilingual program students over a time showed increasing capability in the English language skills (especially reading) and mathematics; in the majority of cases outperformed the non-program students in reading and math and matched national norms in those two areas.[2]

These kinds of studies show that bilingual education has reversed the trend the Civil Rights Commission noted in 1974 that language minority students fall further and further behind the longer they are in the educational system.[2a]

"Mythical" Nature of the Objections.

Dade County in Florida has conducted various evaluation studies of the success of their bilingual programs which serve the majority of the Cuban refugees. The Cuban students were successful in their efforts to become bilingual through the acquisition of English language skills. In reading and math the bilingual students scored above the national average and district average in most grade levels.[3]

If bilingual programs such as those in Colorado, Dade County and Santa Fe can produce such academic achievement results why the furor over it? I suspect that one of the reasons is that bilingual education effectively destroys some myths of American society. Henry Catto in Newsweek perhaps stated one myth clearly, "If education in Spanish (or any other language) is a right, the melting pot principle is in serious danger."[4] Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer in 1963 said, "the point about the melting pot is that it did not happen."[5] Most social scientists and historians would agree that all groups did not merge into the one "new race of men" as Crevecoeur envisioned in 1782.[6]

But beside this myth that American society has removed all differences and melted all of us into the mythical alike American, another myth seems to be that our forefathers from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, etc., did it on their own. That is "they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps" myth.

J. F. Ter Horst in his syndicated column and Henry Catto both make the point that our forefathers "hacked it (Catto's phrase) in English without special help." First of all in the 1800's bilingual education in German was strong in the Midwest. New Mexico and Louisiana also had bilingual education in Spanish and French.[8] Secondly, our grandparents faced a simpler society and educational system. In the past most North Americans - immigrants or native born - in order to compete in U.S. society "merely" had to master the basic skills of a fairly uncomplex community. Going to work at 16 or earlier was the norm rather than the exception. In my parents' generation they weren't high school dropouts, they went out to work to help support the family. Today that has changed and changed drastically. But even if some of our forefathers made it on their own, is not bilingual education a better way? Do today's people have to suffer the same discrimination and difficulties of older generations? Do we respect a past process which at times caused extreme hardship?

Immigrants of today find that a willingness and a strong back are not sufficient to provide upward mobility. Tony Baez in a recent article on Puerto Ricans says "the mode of production in the U.S. was changing rapidly during the late 1930's and early 1940's. Monopoly capital characterized the economy as compared to competitive capital. This also meant a change in the forces of production. The opportunities open to earlier immigrants to become owners of their own labor power were no longer there. While it may appear as if the role of the Puerto Rican immigrants would be similar to that of other immigrants, the outcome of the dialectia

between Puerto Ricans and the economic system in the U.S. would be necessarily different due to the differences in the material conditions of society."[9]

Puerto Ricans, Spanish speaking immigrants and most language minority groups, have ended up with jobs in the low wage service sector (kitchen help, custodians, hospital workers) in light manufacturing or as migrant agricultural workers. The reason for this is twofold. The skilled jobs require more than a high school education. No one else will take the low wage jobs.[10]

Interestingly enough as this phenonomen was occurring in the commercial areas of society, a similar and reflective process occurs in education. The monopoly capital society requires trained and skilled people. Educational levels of society begin to rise during the 1930's and 40's. In 1930, 28.8% of the population finished high school. By 1948, 52.9% of the population finished high school.

The G.I. Bill incidently was one of the ways many people "pulled themselves up by their boot straps."

After World War II, the G.I. Bill allowed many people to resume and finish their education. The percentage of people with college educations increases dramatically after the second World War. From 1940 to 1956 the number of first time college students triples.[11]

It is within this commercial and educational changing environment that the education of language minority students must be viewed. In the past a minimal amount of education - in English and basic skill development - was required for immigrants. Today in a more complex and technological society based on a changed economic philosophy more

education is required. In order to succeed, people need more skills. As in the past certain talented individuals may succeed despite the obstacles placed in their path, but the majority will not overcome the institutional barriers. Santayana's famous phrase of "those being ignorant of the past are bound to repeat it" is true in this case. If we do not reflect carefully on the changed economic and educational situation of today, we will be proposing solutions that are not relevant for today.

The third myth that people like Catto and Ter Horst to bring up is that bilingual education is divisive. Ter Horst says "But the best argument against bilingualism is that it is a divisive scheme that enhances separatism, preserves ghettos and barrios and delays the integration of non-English speaking children into the mainstream of American society."[12] Catto in just as widesweeping but more apocalyptic "By the end of the next decade it is entirely possible that the United States will once again confront the fateful choice it forced in 1860: schism or civil war. The cause this time will be language, and the crisis will have resulted in no small measure from government policy. Two recent events, coming with dramatic simultaneity, foreshadow this bleak future. The separatist election in Quebec showed the grim danger of two competing languages within one nation. And the Spanish armada of Cubans fleeing their wretched homeland is a clear reminder that it is happening to us."[13] It is hard to believe that bilingual education which enrolls less than 3% of the school population could be an instrument of civil war.

Catto's illusion to Quebec is interesting. Most writers opposed to bilingual education quote this example but obviously understand neither Canada nor the role of bilingualism there. The rising tide

of French speaking nationalism is not the result of government sponsored bilingualism but rather the result of the failure of that policy. In Quebec the French speaking majority have long felt that they were being forced into using English without the English speaking population in Quebec learning French. In Belgium a good case can be made that bilingualism is what has saved national unity among Flemings and Walloons.[14]

Most European, Asian and African countries are bilingual if not multilingual. As one watches T.V. each evening it is always amazing how the leaders of the so called 3rd & 4th worlds all are able to speak English and our U.S. leaders are basically monolingual at best. President Carter was a pleasant exception, although his Spanish left quite a bit to be desired.

Underlying all these myths seems to be a basic ethnocentric conviction of the United States. We are superior, so everyone should speak our language. In the area of diplomacy this has incredible drawbacks. Many if not most Embassy and military personnel do not speak the language of the host country. That means that many times information on the situation in the host country is supplied by the English speaking part of that country which usually presents a one sided if not distorted version of reality. Mr. Catto should be well aware of that from his tenure in El Salvador. A good case could be made that if more of his Embassy personnel spoke Spanish in 1972 the current tragedy in El Salvador might have bee averted. The U.S. inability to directly communicate with all sectors of Salvadorean society and its acquiescence in the military overturning of Duarte's legal electoral victory in 1972 has partially led to the present chaos there.

In both Catto's and Ter Horst's articles there seems to be latent hostility towards Hispanics, though it is also extended to other language minority peoples. This is distressing at any time and from any one but more so when it comes from national figures such as Catto and Ter Horst. Equally distressing is Dade County's recent repudiation of its bilingual law. There Dade County may be biting the hand that has helped to feed it for the last ten years. While Catto and Ter Horst are not racists there is an underlying wiff of racism in their articles.

A myth usually develops to help explain a society's way of acting. In the case of bilingual education these above myths seem to be a "rational" attempt to justify our ethnocentrism and latent racism in regards to other groups. But myths are only useful to the extent that they serve a unifying purpose in a culture and society. The above myths have outlived whatever usefulness they may have had.

III. Challenge for the Future

A creative bilingual program freed of various restrictions imposed by federal and state funding requirements could actually go a step further by positively encouraging majority group participation.

The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies says that "our lack of foreign language competence diminishes our capabilities in diplomacy, in foreign trade, and in citizen comprehension of the world." "Americans' incompetence in foreign

languages is nothing short of scandalous, and is becoming worse." "While the use of English as a major international language of business, diplomacy and science should be welcomed as a tone for understanding across national boundaries, this cannot be safely considered a substitute for direct communication in the many areas and on innumerable occasions when knowledge of English cannot be expected. The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of the world's population neither understand nor speaks English, and for most of those who learn English as a foreign language, it remains precisely that".[15] Within the last year two incidents in Afganistan highlights this ignorance. The San Diego Union on May 18, 1980 reported "When terrorists entered the U.S. Embassy in Kabul last year and captured and later killed the U.S. Ambassador, no American there could speak the terrorists' dialect of Farsi and a Russian did the interpreting."[16] Later a Russian soldier defected and no one at the U.S. Embassy spoke sufficient Russian to effectively communicate with him. This happened in a country that has 100,000 Russian invading troops. Interestingly enough Diego Asenscio, the U.S. Ambassador to Columbia, carried on extensive negotiation in Spanish with his terrorist captives and was released unharmed.

Bilingual programs properly run enable non-English speaking students to achieve in English and allow their English speaking classmates to learn the other language. A properly run and respected bilingual program could begin to answer two needs: equal education opportunity for all and provide a pool of capable

bilingual citizens for diplomacy, commerce and other fields of endeavor.

Bilingual programs of this type could foster bilingualism or multilingualism which is usually considered a mark of sophistication and education. The advantage of creating bilingual people at an earlier age could be an unestimable boon for society at a later date. Commerce, government and society in general recognize languages as valuable tools. At the high school level foreign language training usually produces people who can read a language but have little if any real verbal skills. Part of the reason for this is foreign language study is a subject, rather than a language learned in a lived context.

While the above approach would not be necessarily an added incentive for languages with a small number of peoples speaking them, such as various Native American languages, there would still be a great value to the bicultural aspects. Though if Native American groups continue to win law cases over land and mineral rights there may very well be an increasing demand for negotiators who speak their languages!

In any case, education of this type available to all who need it by reason of their language differences and all who wish it in order to become at least partial bilingual would do much to allow groups to understand each other. In many areas a bilingual program of this type would do more to foster integration and cultural understanding than many of the current practices in force today.

The increasing numbers of Indochinese and Asian immigrants has already intensified the need for this type of education for them.[17] Only in Hawaii in the U.S. had any kind of valid multiracial society emerged in which Asian Americans hold positions of major importance. Increasing numbers of immigrants who are culturally non-Western require that a more humane and holistic approach to education emerge. An educational system which fosters and respects cultural and language differences offers more hope for the future than the present approach which deliberately seeks to make all people the same. Especially since the result of the melting pot myth has been to submerge many of those groups at the bottom of the pot economically, socially and educationally, especially if they are non-white. The melting pot, if it ever worked, only succeeded for white Northern Europeans.

Joshua Fishman, a noted bilingual authority wrote as early as 1974, "the Black, Chicano, Boricua, etc., parents and child know that they need bilingualism and biculturalism; but unless the Anglo-American child participates in such education as well, it can only be a 'sop to the poor' or a 'gimmick for the disadvantaged' rather than a serious quest for a better society and a saner world. For bilingual and bicultural education to succeed in its greater cultural mission, it must be available to all, be they large or small on the world scene, be they in need of broader exposure or deeper roots. . . ."Both minority and majority children need strong multiple cultural loyalties, moreover, broader, and yet broader, if they are to reach their true <u>human</u> potentials and in doing so, save the world itself." [18]

What is being proposed here is different from what actually exists generally in bilingual education in the United States. The usual result of state and federal legislation is to gear the bilingual program toward the language minority child - who is obviously the target group. However, the end result is a program for the disadvantaged, a program to remedy "language deficiencies"; in short a remedial program. As long as bilingual education remains a compensatory program it will have an uncertain future.[19]

Most current bilingual programs are transitional i.e., the goal is to make a non or limited English speaker proficient enough in English so that the student may be mainstreamed into an all English speaking classroom. Preservation of the mother tongue is incidental. Conservation and development of the mother tongue is ordinarily forbidden or at least frowned upon.

Hall, a noted anthropologist stated long before the beginning of the bilingual movement in the U.S. "the degradation of one's mother tongue (and culture) as inferior in social and educational situations can be traumatic in the extreme." [20]

Rosa Guas Inclan commenting on Hall's statement writes:

> "In essence, this 'degradation' is what takes place when limited English speaking children are involved alone in a program in which they, and not the children of the "power structure" parents, learn in their home language only as long as necessary in order to be able to survive in the English speaking world while they become English speakers, and then forget their language of origin which no one in their new community valued enough, anyway, to take the trouble to learn it." [21]

The President's Commission makes the same point saying "the melting pot tradition that denigrates immigrants' ~~mainstream~~ MAINTAINED of their skill to speak their native tongue still lingers, and this unfortunately causes linguistic minorities at home to be ignored as a potential asset." 22

Even in Colorado where the State Act encourages the participation of children of the "power structure", participation becomes problematic when funding is reduced, when legislators want to know why children "who don't need it" are in the program. But more devastating is the popular image of bilingual education which many school districts present to parents i.e. it is a remedial program for the underachievers. Parents, Anglos and Hispanics are reluctant to place their children in a program which has a pejorative connotation.

Can educators, legislators and businesspeople unite to sponsor and foster a bilingual program which combines the best of various approaches? Can we promote a program which allows both groups of students - LEPS and monolingual English children - to learn in two languages so that at the end of the process both groups of students are bilingual and achieving academically? Can we create a learning environment in which the languages and cultures of <u>all</u> the students are treated with equal respect?

Can we develop a new operational myth of national identification which glories in the richness of cultural diversity instead of still clinging to the melting pot myth which sees sameness as the badge of national unity?

FOOTNOTES

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12. Ter Horst, op cit.

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Footnotes (Continued)

19. Carter, Thomas. Bilingual Program, Policy and Assessment Issues. California State Department of Education, Sacramento, California, 1980. p. 83-95.

20. Quoted in Guas Inclan, op cit. p. 42.

21. Guas Inclan, op c't. p. 42.

22. op cit. p. 6.